



# EF EPI

EF English Proficiency Index

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From the executive to the entrepreneur, the programmer to the public servant, nearly every professional gains access to a wealth of resources and opportunities by mastering English. In a world where integration is the norm, English has become the medium of cross-cultural communication for a growing number of people in an increasingly diverse set of situations. No skill since literacy has held such potential to increase the efficiency and earning power of so many. The impact of English on the global economy is undeniable.

Over the past decade, EF Education First (EF) has tested the English skills of millions of adults around the world. Each year, EF publishes the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), a worldwide benchmark for measuring and tracking adult English proficiency over time. The EF EPI adds to ongoing discussions about the strategic importance of English in the world today.

This sixth edition of the EF EPI ranks 72 countries and territories based on test data from more than 950,000 adults who took our online English tests in 2015. The first section of the report looks at the relationship between English and a range of economic and social indicators, including earning power, innovation, and connectivity. The second section examines the position of English in four different regions of the world—Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)—and discusses the challenges and opportunities that countries in these regions experience as they strive to develop English-speaking workforces.

Highlights of this year's findings include:

- English is a key component of economic competitiveness at both the individual and national levels. Higher English proficiency correlates with higher incomes, better quality of life, more dynamic business environments, greater connectivity, and more innovation.
- The range of English proficiency is broader than we have ever found. Both Asia and Europe have at least one country in each of the five proficiency bands.
- English proficiency in Europe remains the strongest in the world by a wide margin, with Northern European countries occupying the top five positions in this year's index.
- For the first time ever, an Asian country, Singapore, is in the highest proficiency band. Malaysia and the Philippines are also in the top 15 countries worldwide.
- Though the decline is slight, Latin America is the only region with an average proficiency level that has dropped in the past year.
- Countries in the Middle East and North Africa are uniformly in the lowest proficiency bands, and in most MENA countries, English proficiency is not improving.
- Women speak English better than men in almost all countries and age groups. This finding has been consistent across all editions of the EF EPI.
- Young adults aged 18-25 have the strongest English proficiency worldwide, although some countries have markedly different national trends.

# EF EPI 2016 RANKINGS

## PROFICIENCY BANDS

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

### VERY HIGH PROFICIENCY

01	Netherlands	72.16
02	Denmark	71.15
03	Sweden	70.81
04	Norway	68.54
05	Finland	66.61
06	Singapore	63.52
07	Luxembourg	63.20

### HIGH PROFICIENCY

08	Austria	62.13
09	Germany	61.58
10	Poland	61.49
11	Belgium	60.90
12	Malaysia	60.70
13	Philippines	60.33
14	Switzerland	60.17
15	Portugal	59.68
16	Czech Republic	59.09
17	Serbia	59.07
18	Hungary	58.72
19	Argentina	58.40
20	Romania	58.14

### MODERATE PROFICIENCY

21	Slovakia	57.34
22	India	57.30
23	Dominican Republic	57.24
24	Bulgaria	56.79
25	Spain	56.66
26	Bosnia & Herzegovina	56.17
27	South Korea	54.87
28	Italy	54.63
29	France	54.33
30	Hong Kong	54.29
31	Vietnam	54.06
32	Indonesia	52.94
33	Taiwan	52.82

### LOW PROFICIENCY

34	Russia	52.32
35	Japan	51.69
36	Uruguay	51.63
37	Macau	51.36
38	Costa Rica	51.35
39	China	50.94
40	Brazil	50.66
41	Ukraine	50.62
42	Chile	50.10
43	Mexico	49.88
44	Morocco	49.86
45	Peru	49.83
46	U.A.E.	49.81
47	Ecuador	49.13
48	Pakistan	48.78

### VERY LOW PROFICIENCY

49	Colombia	48.41
50	Panama	48.08
51	Turkey	47.89
52	Tunisia	47.70
53	Guatemala	47.64
54	Kazakhstan	47.42
55	Egypt	47.32
56	Thailand	47.21
57	Azerbaijan	46.90
58	Sri Lanka	46.58
59	Qatar	46.57
60	Venezuela	46.53
61	Iran	46.38
62	Jordan	45.85
63	El Salvador	43.83
64	Oman	43.44
65	Kuwait	42.98
66	Mongolia	42.77
67	Algeria	41.60
68	Saudi Arabia	40.91
69	Cambodia	39.48
70	Laos	38.45
71	Libya	37.82
72	Iraq	37.65

# EF EPI PROFICIENCY BANDS

The EF English Proficiency Index places the surveyed countries and territories into five proficiency bands, from Very High to Very Low. These proficiency bands make it easier to identify countries with similar skill levels and to draw comparisons between and within regions. In the chart on the following page, we give examples of tasks that an individual could accomplish at each proficiency band. The selection of tasks is not meant to be exhaustive, but it is a useful reference for understanding how skills advance across the bands.

It is important to keep in mind that a country's proficiency band merely indicates the level of the "average" person surveyed there. The EF EPI seeks to compare countries and territories, which necessitates overlooking individual strengths and weaknesses.

## ABOUT EF EPI PROFICIENCY BANDS

The EF EPI proficiency bands make it easier to identify countries with similar skill levels and to draw comparisons between and within regions. The tasks listed for each proficiency band demonstrate some of what an individual should be able to accomplish at each level. The countries listed are the top three countries of each band. The EF EPI only surveys countries and territories where English is not a native language.

PROFICIENCY BAND	COUNTRIES/TERRITORIES	SAMPLE TASKS
<b>VERY HIGH PROFICIENCY</b>	NETHERLANDS DENMARK SWEDEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Use nuanced and appropriate language in social situations</li> <li>✓ Read advanced texts with ease</li> <li>✓ Negotiate a contract with a native English speaker</li> </ul>
<b>HIGH PROFICIENCY</b>	AUSTRIA GERMANY POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Make a presentation at work</li> <li>✓ Understand TV shows</li> <li>✓ Read a newspaper</li> </ul>
<b>MODERATE PROFICIENCY</b>	SLOVAKIA INDIA DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Participate in meetings in one's area of expertise</li> <li>✓ Understand song lyrics</li> <li>✓ Write professional emails on familiar subjects</li> </ul>
<b>LOW PROFICIENCY</b>	RUSSIA JAPAN URUGUAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Navigate an English-speaking country as a tourist</li> <li>✓ Engage in small talk with colleagues</li> <li>✓ Understand simple emails from colleagues</li> </ul>
<b>VERY LOW PROFICIENCY</b>	COLOMBIA PANAMA TURKEY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Introduce oneself simply (name, age, country of origin)</li> <li>✓ Understand simple signs</li> <li>✓ Give basic directions to a foreign visitor</li> </ul>



# ENGLISH, ECONOMICS, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

## THE CHANGING ROLE OF ENGLISH

English spread as a language of international trade and diplomacy first under the British Empire, and then during the postwar economic expansion of the United States. In many countries, English has replaced French as an indicator of the well-educated upper class.

Globalization, urbanization, and the rise of the Internet have dramatically changed the role of English in the past 20 years. Today, English proficiency is less associated with the elite, and it is not as closely tied to the United States or the United Kingdom as it once was. Instead, English is becoming a basic skill for the entire global workforce, in the same way that literacy has transformed in the last two centuries from an elite privilege into a basic requirement for informed citizenship. On the individual level, English has the potential to generate opportunities, strengthen employability, and expand horizons.

## A VIRTUOUS CYCLE

The interaction between English proficiency and Adjusted Net National Income per capita (Graph A) seems to be a virtuous cycle. An improvement in English proficiency is tied to a rise in salaries, which may in turn lead governments and individuals to invest more in English training. In many countries, higher English proficiency correlates with a lower unemployment rate among young people. As such, English is key to a country's economic development.

## ENGLISH FACILITATES BUSINESS

Countries and companies that wish to attract foreign investments and trade, as well as stimulate entrepreneurial growth, have recognized the importance of English for creating a business-friendly environment. An increasing number of companies headquartered in non-English-speaking countries (e.g., Rakuten, Renault, and Samsung) have adopted English as their corporate language.

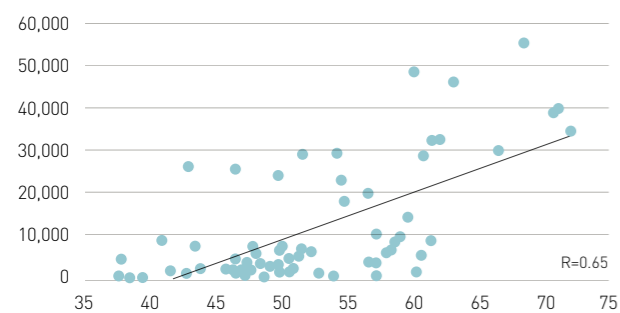
Indices of quality of life, such as the Human Development Index (Graph B), also correlate positively with the EF EPI. The Human Development Index measures education attainment, life expectancy, literacy, and standards of living. A few countries have low or moderate English proficiency and high levels of development. However, all High and Very High Proficiency countries are rated "Very High Human Development" on the HDI.

## ENGLISH AS A VITAL SKILL

The evidence presented in this report shows that English is a core skill today. As such, it should be taught and tested at a level equivalent to native language reading and math skills. Considering the increased importance of English over the last 20 years, a strong working knowledge of the language will be even more important when today's youth enter the workforce.

GRAPH A: ENGLISH AND INCOME

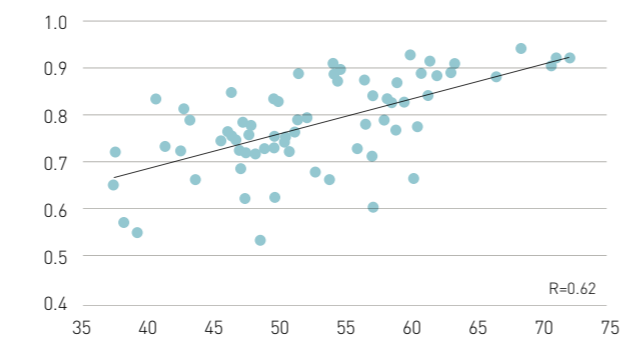
Adjusted Net National Income per capita (Constant 2005 USD)



Source: World Bank, 2014

GRAPH B: ENGLISH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

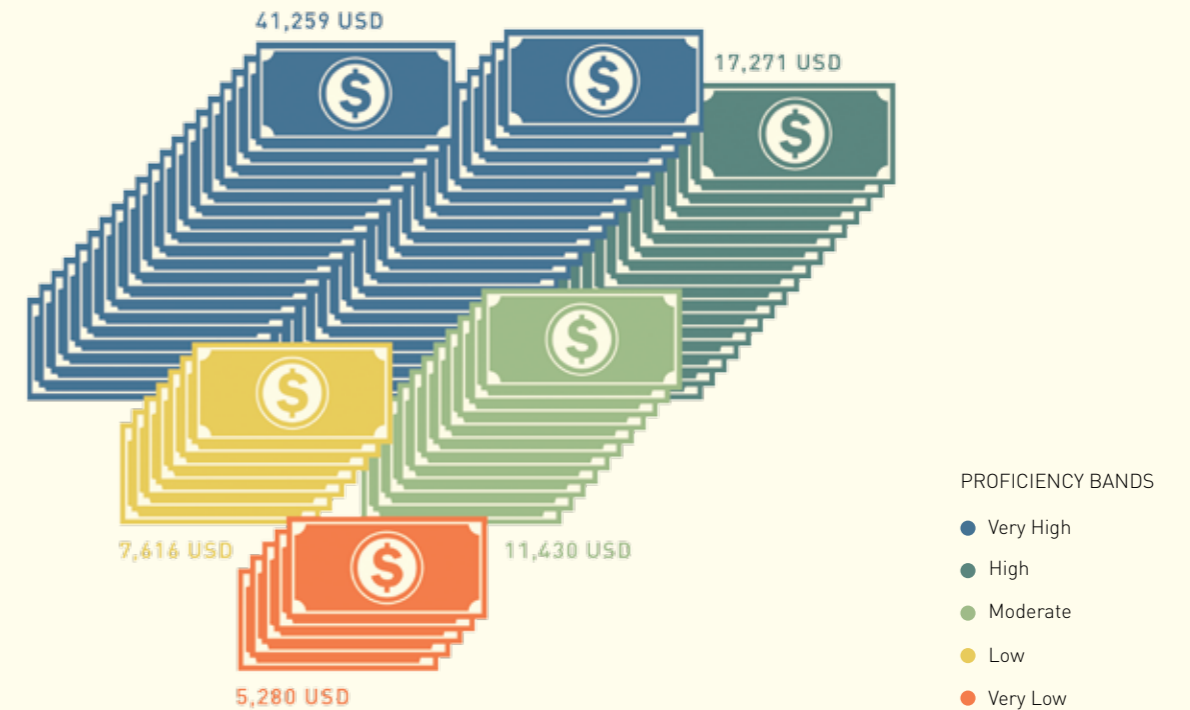
Human Development Index (HDI)



Source: United Nations Human Development Report, 2015

## INDIVIDUAL EARNING POWER AND ENGLISH

This infographic shows the average Adjusted Net National Income per capita of the countries in each EF EPI proficiency band. The data reveals a clear relationship between English skills and individual earning power.



Source: World Bank, 2014

# ENGLISH AND INNOVATION

One common challenge for multinational companies is to create cohesion within culturally diverse workforces. English serves as a bridge that connects employees across countries and cultures, weaving networks for innovation.

## THE VITAL ROLE OF ENGLISH IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The information technology sector relies on international communication. According to a 2014 survey by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the top 10 programming languages in the world are all English-based. Two of these, Python and Ruby, were created by non-native English speakers.

Countries with better English skills tend to produce more high-technology exports (Graph C) and invest more in research and development in fields such as aerospace, computers, pharmaceuticals, scientific instruments, and electrical machinery.

English is also critical to science and engineering. Countries with higher English proficiency have more researchers and technicians per capita, as well as larger expenditures for research and development (Graph D).

## ENGLISH SPREADS IDEAS

There are clear reasons why countries with strong English proficiency tend to thrive in the innovation sector. English skills allow innovators to read primary scientific research, form international collaborations, bring in talent from overseas, and participate in conferences. English proficiency expands the number of connections innovators can make with the ideas and people they need to generate original work.

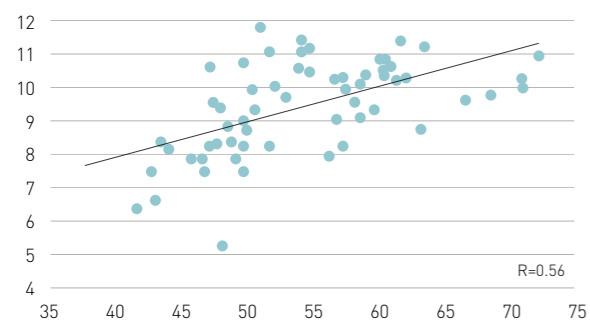
By a wide margin, researchers in the United States publish the most scientific papers every year, and the United Kingdom ranks third in publication numbers, after China.

However, despite its publication volume, Chinese research accounts for only 4% of global citations in science publications, compared to 30% for the U.S. and 8% for the U.K. This disparity indicates that Chinese research is less integrated into the global knowledge economy.

Countries with low English proficiency also demonstrate unusually low levels of international collaboration on research. In 2015, only 21% of scientific papers published in China included an international collaborator, compared to more than half in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Singapore, and Sweden. This inability to access the research published by others and to contribute to international innovation is a significant challenge for countries lacking English skills.

GRAPH C: ENGLISH AND HIGH-TECH EXPORTS

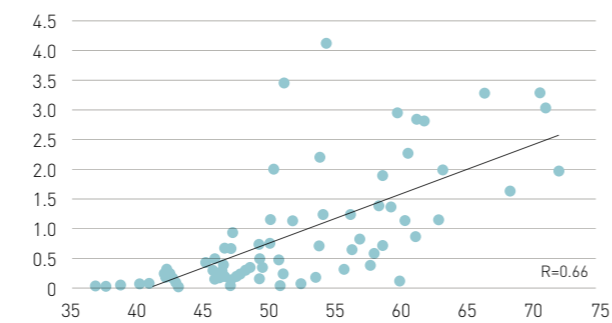
### High-Technology Exports (Log Scale)



EF EPI Score  
Source: World Bank, 2014

GRAPH D: ENGLISH AND SPENDING ON INNOVATION

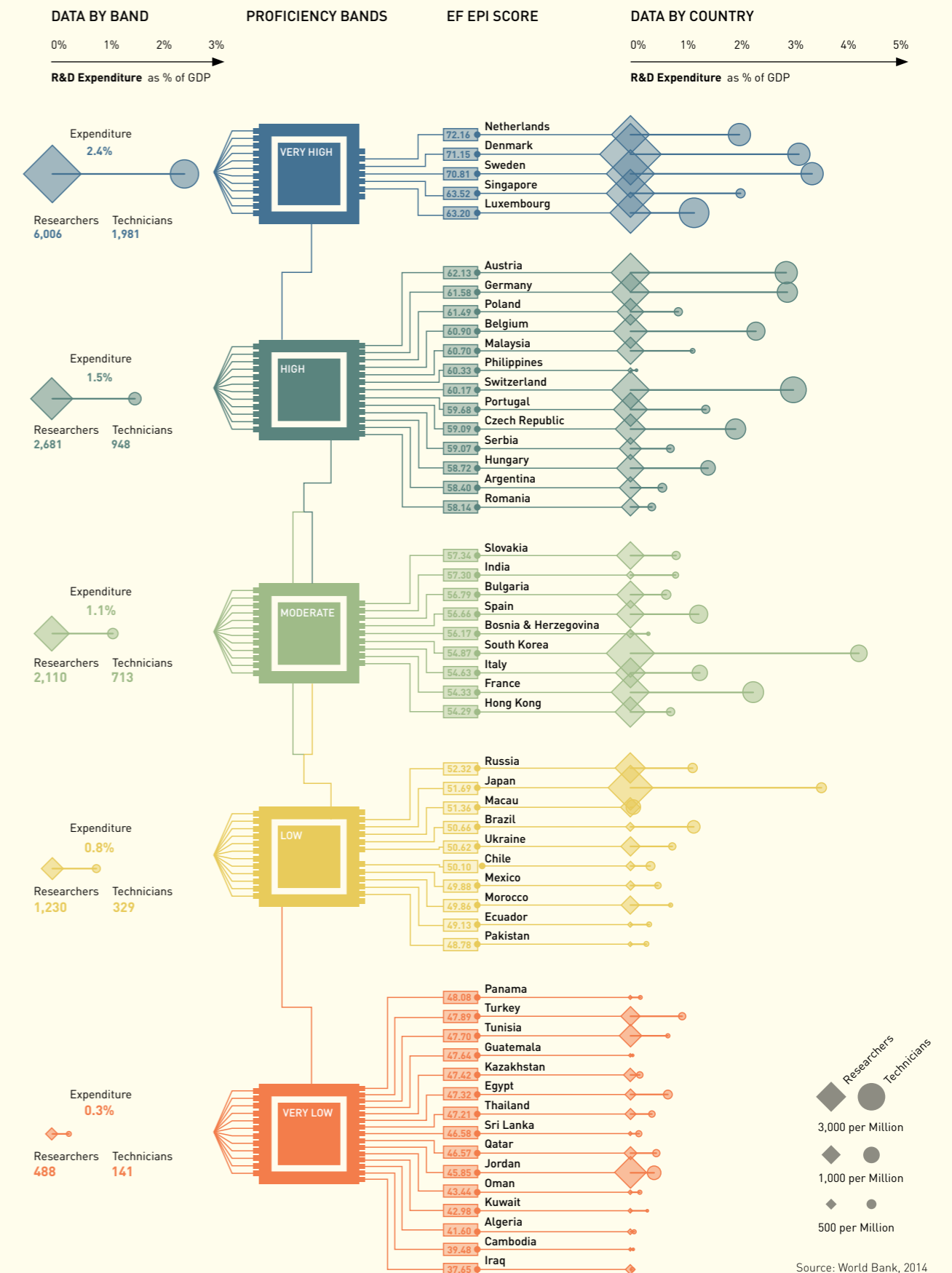
### R&D Expenditure (% of GDP)



EF EPI Score  
Source: World Bank, 2014

## ENGLISH IS KEY FOR UNLEASHING INNOVATION

English correlates with a number of innovation measures from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, suggesting that English is a key factor for innovation. This infographic shows that countries with higher English proficiency spend more on research and development and have more researchers and technicians per capita.



# ENGLISH AND TECHNOLOGY

## EXPANSION OF INTERNET CONNECTIVITY AND MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

In countries where English proficiency is high, Internet penetration is also high. English proficiency correlates positively with a country's number of Internet users. Additionally, the Groupe Speciale Mobile Association (GSMA) and the Mozilla Foundation estimate that by 2017, mobile broadband connections in the developing world will reach three billion, half of which will be smartphone connections.

The expansion of mobile technology and Internet connectivity will empower more of the world's two billion English language learners to access online learning tools that make English learning more individualized, more interactive, and more accessible. Language learning products designed for phones and tablets allow users to study anytime in any place. Many of these products are much less expensive than traditional language classes, or even free. This makes language learning accessible to learners who do not have the time, resources, or opportunity to take classes.

## TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMS THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

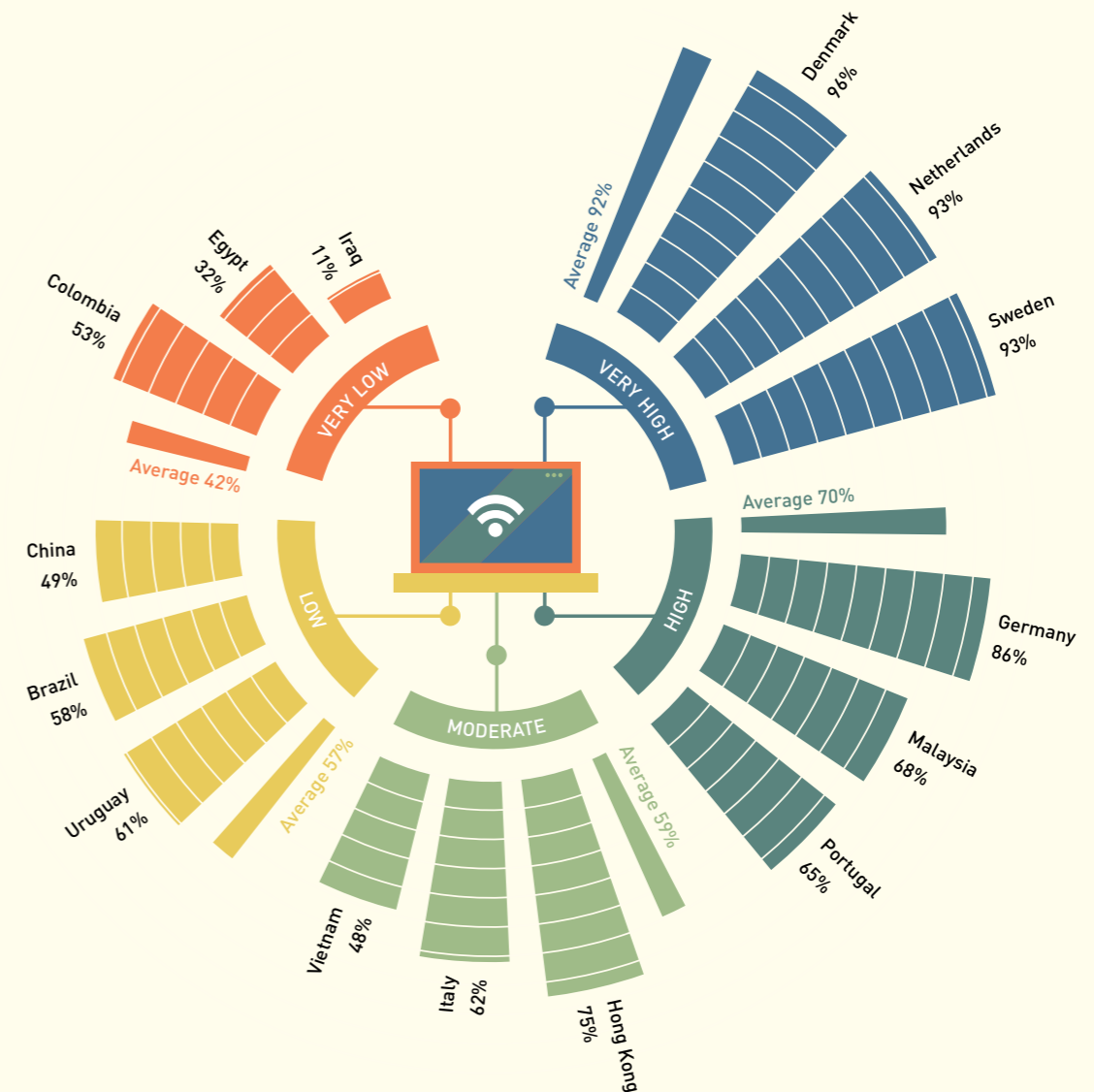
Researchers have found that learners perform better in classes that combine face-to-face and online learning than they do in traditional face-to-face classes. As educational tools and school infrastructures improve, and educators gain experience using technology appropriately in the classroom, we can only expect these benefits to grow.

Here are six ways in which technology can transform the language classroom:

- Optimize teachers' time by supporting student practice.** Teacher time is one of the most valuable and limited resources in the classroom. To optimize their time, teachers can have some students work independently on digital devices while they provide differentiated instruction to small groups of students.
- Provide instant feedback.** Students and teachers can receive instant feedback from learning systems for routine practice activities, saving teachers grading time and allowing them to track students' progress on discrete skills over time.
- Personalize learning.** Individualizing instruction is a major challenge for most teachers because of large class sizes and the wide range of English proficiencies, motivation levels, and preferred learning styles among students. Technology can make it more practical for teachers to assign and track different work for different students. Some systems can give students personalized activities, such as extra practice on topics they struggle with, allowing students to work at their own pace and review as necessary.
- Support richer classroom interactions.** For instance, polling tools, which aggregate and display student responses, encourage student participation and spark class discussions. Game-based leaderboards motivate students and foster friendly competition. Live messaging in class or writing on a class blog at home can give reluctant speakers safer spaces to participate in discussion.
- Support students with learning disabilities.** An often overlooked benefit of technology in classrooms is the ability to make materials more accessible to learners with impairments through features such as text-to-speech, enhanced contrast, or configurable text size.
- Provide easy access to up-to-date materials and authentic English.** Unlike books, digital content can be continuously and seamlessly revised, helping it stay up to date. For instance, some products even publish new daily lessons on current events, which is impossible in a book. Technology can also connect students to native English speakers or other learners with whom they have to use English to communicate because it is their only shared language.

## ENGLISH AND INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

More than 50% of the content on the Internet is in English. English proficiency has a positive correlation ( $r=0.67$ ) with a country's number of Internet users. This infographic shows the average Internet penetration for the countries in each EF EPI proficiency band, as well as three sample countries per band. The number given for Internet penetration indicates the percentage of people with Internet access within a country or proficiency band.



Source: World Bank, 2014





## REGIONAL PROFILES

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The following section examines the position of English in four different regions of the world: Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

These regional profiles discuss the challenges and opportunities that countries in these regions face as they strive to develop English-speaking workforces. The analyses also examine gender and generational trends, highlighting demographic differences that reflect these regions' historical and economic contexts.

More country-level data is available at [www.ef.com/epi](http://www.ef.com/epi).

# EUROPE



## EUROPE LEADS BY PROMOTING MULTILINGUALISM

Promoting foreign language education is at the core of the European Union’s multilingualism policy, which aims to facilitate movement within Europe and protect the rich linguistic diversity of the continent.

As a result, English proficiency in Europe is the strongest in the world, with European countries occupying nine of the top 10 positions in the index this year. However, our results show significant regional differences in English proficiency. These disparities are tied to differences in national education systems and language education policies, as well as the prevalence of English in everyday life.

### THE NETHERLANDS AND THE NORDIC COUNTRIES REMAIN ON TOP

The Very High Proficiency band once again features the Netherlands and four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden). These five countries have occupied the top five slots in five of six editions of the EF EPI, proving themselves to be world leaders in English language education.

English proficiency is largely ensured by the public education systems in these countries, which have included English as a compulsory subject throughout primary and secondary school for four decades or more. The foreign language teaching policies in these countries focus on communication rather than on the mastery of grammar.

However, schooling alone cannot explain the consistently strong proficiency levels in Northern Europe. Daily life in the region is characterized by constant exposure to English through non-dubbed English-language media, particularly on television. This level of exposure expands vocabulary and increases comprehension and production abilities, even among young children not yet studying English formally.

There is still room for improvement, however, even in these countries with high English proficiency. Recent reforms have tackled the problem of inadequate command of academic and formal written English among Scandinavian students, which, in the long run, limits study abroad opportunities and dampens economic competitiveness.

### SUCCESSES OF MULTILINGUAL INSTRUCTION

Several Central European countries have experienced small but steady improvements in English proficiency over the past decade. Countries such as Belgium, Germany, Poland, and Switzerland have made huge efforts to implement national teaching standards and curricula aimed at increasing the quality of foreign language instruction. These countries’ positive results can be attributed to policies that require students to study more than one foreign language, with English as a required foreign language in the curriculum.

Countries with more than one official language, such as Belgium and Switzerland, have managed to include a high level of English instruction in their students’ education alongside their national languages, demonstrating that it is possible for students to master multiple foreign languages.

Although public expenditure on education remains low in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Serbia compared to other countries in Europe, all three countries boast a remarkable level of English proficiency. In these countries, there is a widespread acceptance that foreign language skills are essential for international integration, coupled with education systems that emphasize the importance of English and other foreign languages in knowledge-based economies.

### THE MYTH OF A NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

Rather than a geographic rift in English proficiency levels, our data indicate a more subtle linguistic lag in countries with Latinate languages. The three largest European economies with Romance languages as their primary national languages—France, Italy, and Spain—show English proficiency levels at or below the European average. Italy and Spain are in a stable position compared to last year and have improved somewhat in the past eight years. Recent reforms in these countries have made English compulsory and introduced communicative teaching methods in schools, but improvements so far have been modest.

As for France, despite a long-anticipated improvement in proficiency levels, the country still lags behind its European neighbors. Teaching methods in France do not emphasize the development of communication skills, and people have little exposure to English in everyday life. In addition, the idea of “Americanization” has influenced the public debate on foreign language education policies in the country, complicating practical conversations about teaching by bringing in the emotionally charged issue of national identity. It remains to be seen if France’s improvement will continue in the coming years, bringing the country more in line with the rest of the region.

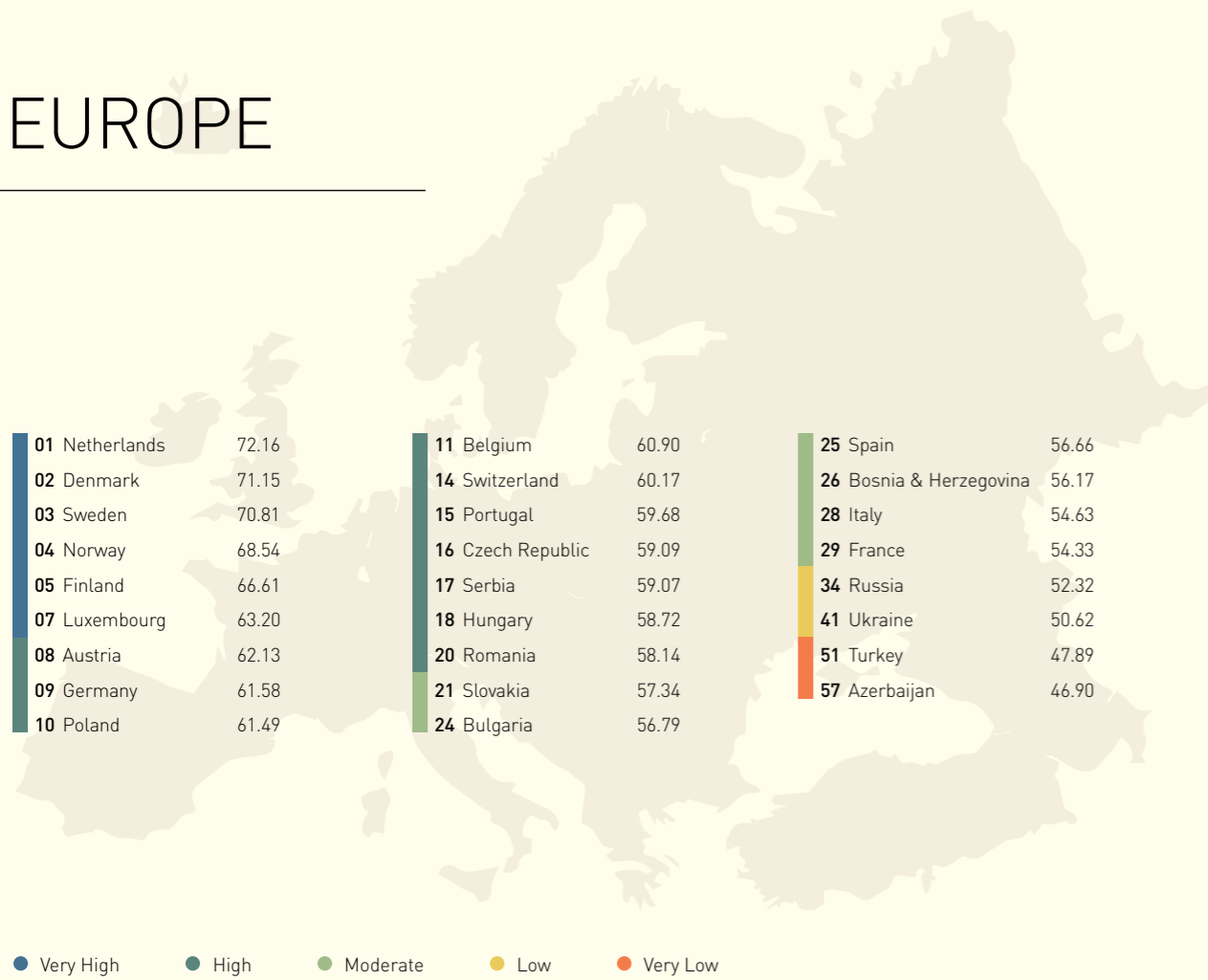
### EUROPE’S LEAST PROFICIENT COUNTRIES

Although English proficiency in Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey has improved slightly since last year, these countries still remain far behind their European neighbors. In these countries outside the European Union, English instruction is still delivered in local languages, focuses on memorization rather than communication, and suffers from a lack of standardization of the curricula. However, score improvements in the past few years show that national efforts to boost English skills in Russia and Turkey are beginning to have some impact.

### CONCLUSION

Europe’s English proficiency remains far higher than that of other regions, with Northern and Central Europe leading the world. The large Romance-language countries are at or below the European average, and countries at the edge of the European Union perform at an entirely different level from the rest of the region. Given the vital role of multilingualism in today’s interconnected world, Europe’s language education policy sets the global standard. Although these efforts have not been entirely successful, the policy promotes standardization and economic competitiveness while respecting the region’s linguistic diversity.

# EUROPE

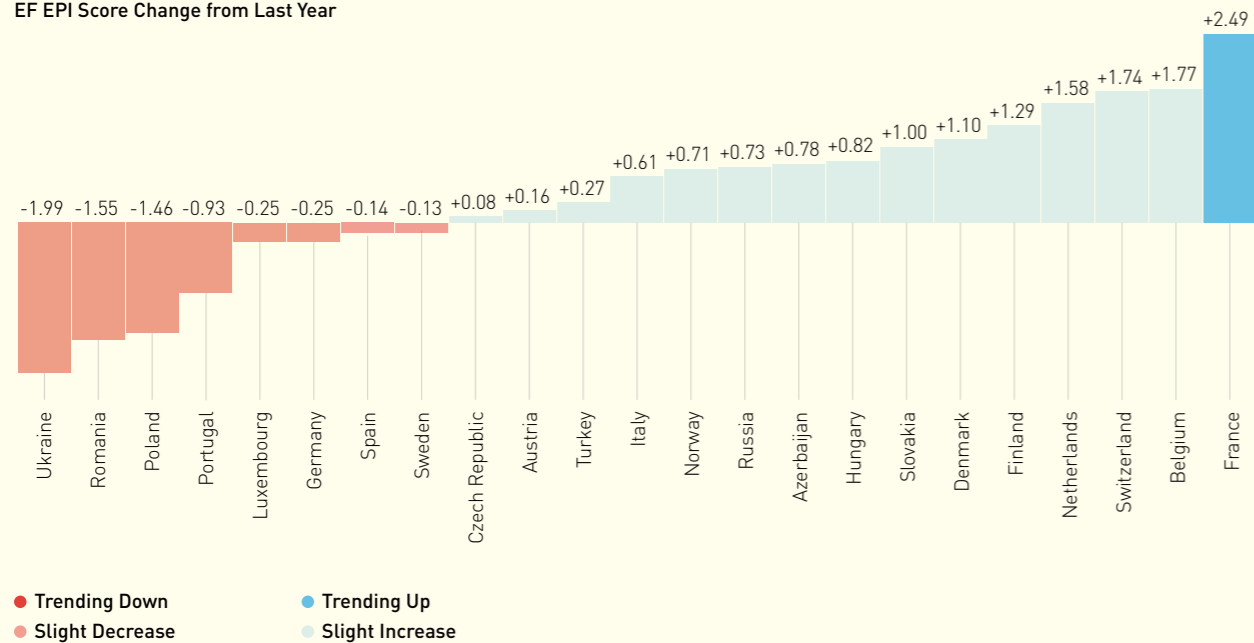


● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

## EF EPI TRENDS

Few European countries show significant change in their English proficiency scores. France stands out for the significant progress it made this year, posting its highest-ever EF EPI score and moving from Low Proficiency to Moderate Proficiency. Poland, Romania, and Ukraine show the largest declines.

### EF EPI Score Change from Last Year

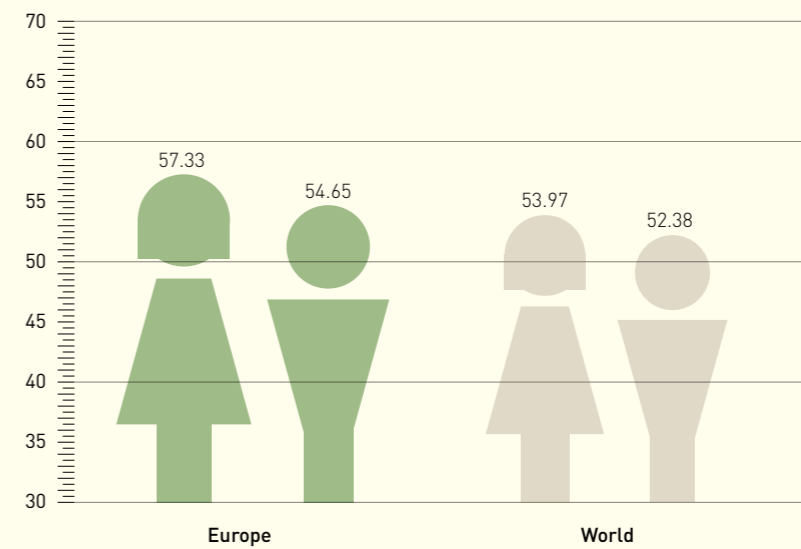


● Trending Down ● Trending Up  
● Slight Decrease ● Slight Increase

## GENDER GAP

The average scores for European men and women are significantly higher than the global averages. In accordance with global trends, European women have markedly higher proficiency levels than European men.

### EF EPI Score

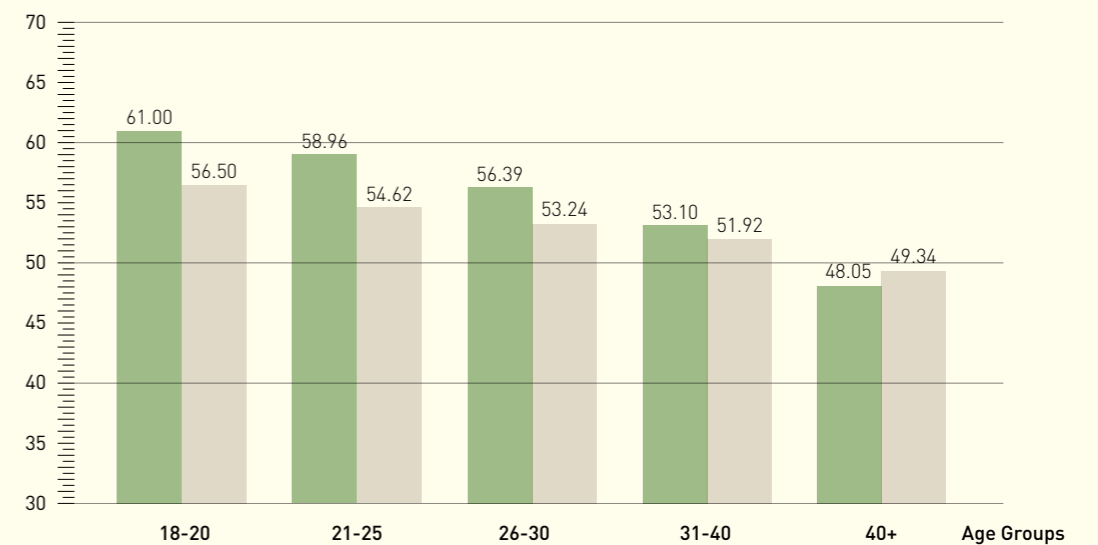


● Europe ● World

## GENERATION GAP

European adults have the widest range of proficiency scores of adults in any region. On average, college-aged students fall in the High Proficiency band, while adults over 40 fall below global averages for their age group. Older Europeans attended schools with significantly different language education curricula, and that difference is clear from the range of skill levels exhibited.

### EF EPI Score



● Europe ● World



# ASIA



## ECONOMIC FORCES DRIVE ENGLISH LEARNING IN ASIA

There is a clear divide in Asia between countries previously under the influence of the British Empire, where English has long played an important role in daily communication, and countries where English is used primarily as a foreign language for communication with outsiders.

In the first group of countries, English is both a class marker and an institutional standard. In the second group of countries, policies and attitudes towards English are in flux as the language's role evolves.

### HISTORICAL TIES TO ENGLISH

Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Singapore all have historical relationships with English. Due to this history, English is often used as one of the languages of government, as a language of instruction in schools, and as a means of daily communication in some social spheres. As is the case everywhere else in Asia, these countries also use English for business and tourism. All of these countries have complicated relationships with English, however, as accent and dialect often play a central role in personal, social, and national identity.

As one might expect, English proficiency tends to be higher in countries with historical ties to the language than in other parts of Asia. Singapore has the strongest English proficiency in Asia, with an increase of nearly two and a half points since last year. This puts the country squarely in the Very High Proficiency band, up six places in the rankings.

### ENGLISH FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

In Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam, English is used extensively for trade, international business, manufacturing, and it is increasingly used in the academic world. Though some of these countries start teaching English in primary school, English is not commonly used in everyday life. Private English classes are common in these countries, as it is widely believed that public schools do not teach English well enough for formal usage in academic and professional settings.

In many Asian countries, scores on English exams play a role in university entrance, graduation, and employment. For example, China's university English exams have a

disproportionate impact on the job market, with companies setting cutoff scores to filter applicants even when English proficiency is not essential for the position. The role of these exams is subject to heated debate, with some concerned about the growing prominence of English in relation to the local language.

### CHINA AS A GLOBAL LEADER

Expanding China's participation in global trade, President Xi Jinping recently pledged 40 billion USD to fund infrastructure projects in 65 countries. The One Belt, One Road initiative aims to promote economic integration across Africa, Asia, and Europe.

As China positions itself as a global economic power, English proficiency will be key to its international development. An English-speaking workforce attracts foreign business at home and enables local companies to expand globally. In 2015, foreign direct investment in China reached a record high, and Chinese firms spent a record amount on foreign acquisitions—an amount that is on track to more than double in 2016. A number of Chinese companies have also established major global presences. For instance, Alibaba is now the world's largest retailer, and Huawei provides services in more than 140 countries.

As our EF EPI findings suggest, when a country has strong adult English proficiency, its innovation sector can better draw from the global pool of talent and ideas. As China strives to lead the world in innovation with greater investment in science and technology, the role of English will become even more important.

### ENGLISH AND GLOBAL TOURISM

In Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, tourism and hospitality have helped define the role of English. In these countries, international tourism is a significant portion of the economy, and it requires a workforce with English proficiency to remain competitive.

New forms of specialized and high-end tourism also require local English-speaking professionals, such as doctors and nurses. These economic incentives are driving Southeast Asian initiatives to reform English instruction in schools, better train English teachers, and open access to continuing education for adults.

### ASIAN STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD

The lure of studying abroad also increases the importance of English in East Asia. The number of mainland Chinese university students abroad, primarily in English-speaking countries, has risen each year for the past decade. In 2015, more than 520,000 Chinese students left China to study abroad, and 97% are self-funded. This trend is leading to an influx of foreign-educated students to the local workforce, raising the standard for English proficiency among job seekers.

The number of Japanese students abroad has declined over the past few years. In response, the Tobitate! Ryugaku Japan program aims to double the number of Japanese students enrolled in overseas university degree programs by 2020. Japan has dropped from Moderate Proficiency to Low Proficiency in this year's index, which highlights the country's struggle to implement sustainable English education programs.

### CONCLUSION

With the addition of Laos, Macau, and the Philippines to the index for the first time this year, a clearer picture is emerging of the wide-ranging role that English plays in Asia. Every country in Asia, no matter how skilled, would benefit economically from higher English proficiency across a broader swath of the workforce. In order to achieve that goal, however, these countries must learn from one another, measure their efforts, and adjust their strategies according to what has been proven to work.

# ASIA

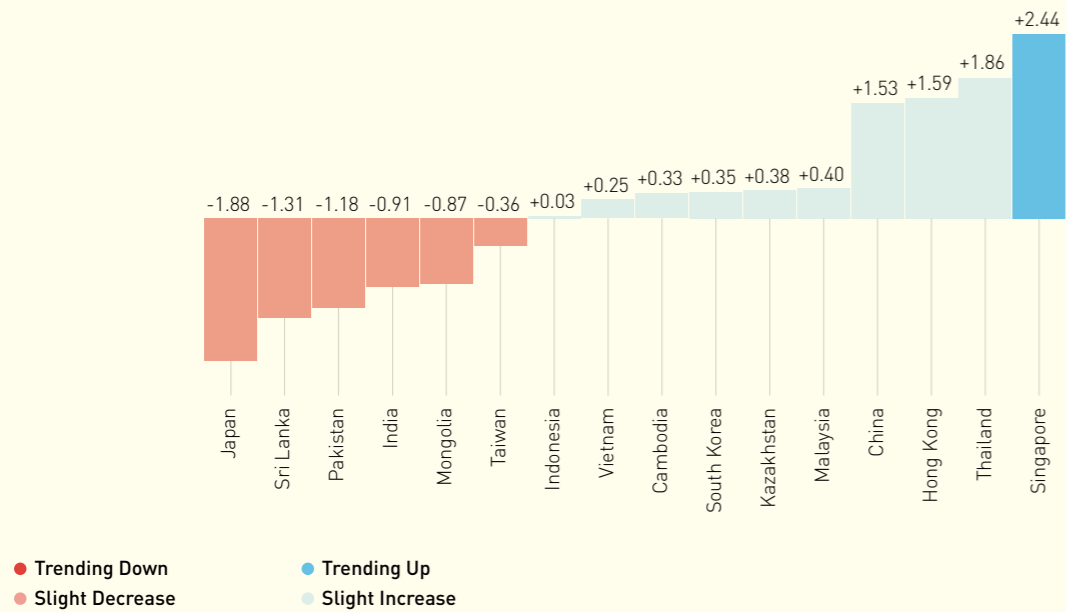
06 Singapore	63.52	32 Indonesia	52.94	54 Kazakhstan	47.42
12 Malaysia	60.70	33 Taiwan	52.82	56 Thailand	47.21
13 Philippines	60.33	35 Japan	51.69	58 Sri Lanka	46.58
22 India	57.30	37 Macau	51.36	66 Mongolia	42.77
27 South Korea	54.87	39 China	50.94	69 Cambodia	39.48
30 Hong Kong	54.29	48 Pakistan	48.78	70 Laos	38.45
31 Vietnam	54.06				

● Very High   
 ● High   
 ● Moderate   
 ● Low   
 ● Very Low

## EF EPI TRENDS

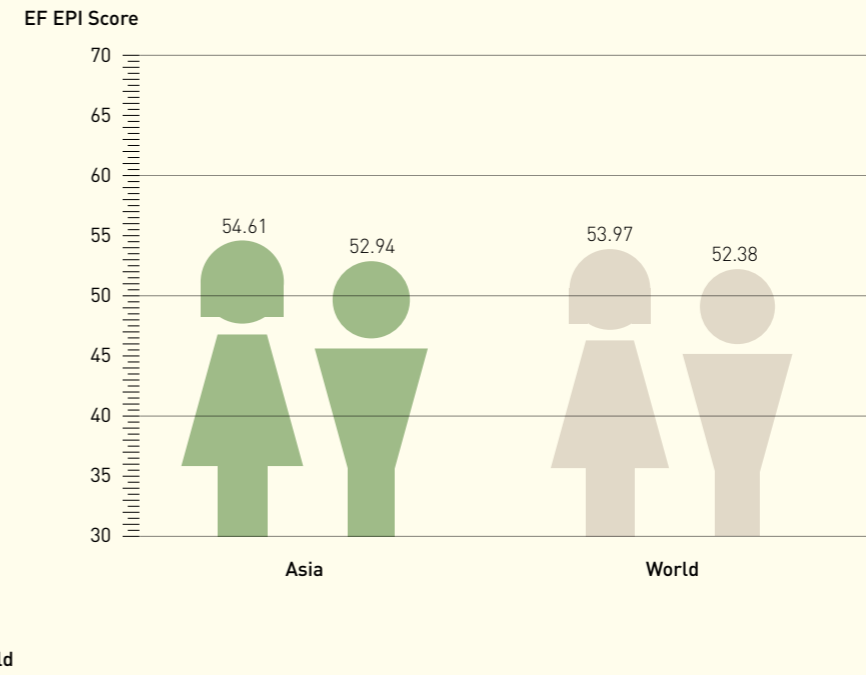
Singapore stands out this year for making the most improvement in Asia, and for being the first Asian country to reach the highest proficiency band. China, Hong Kong, and Thailand have also made notable progress, while Japan declined the most among Asian countries this year.

### EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



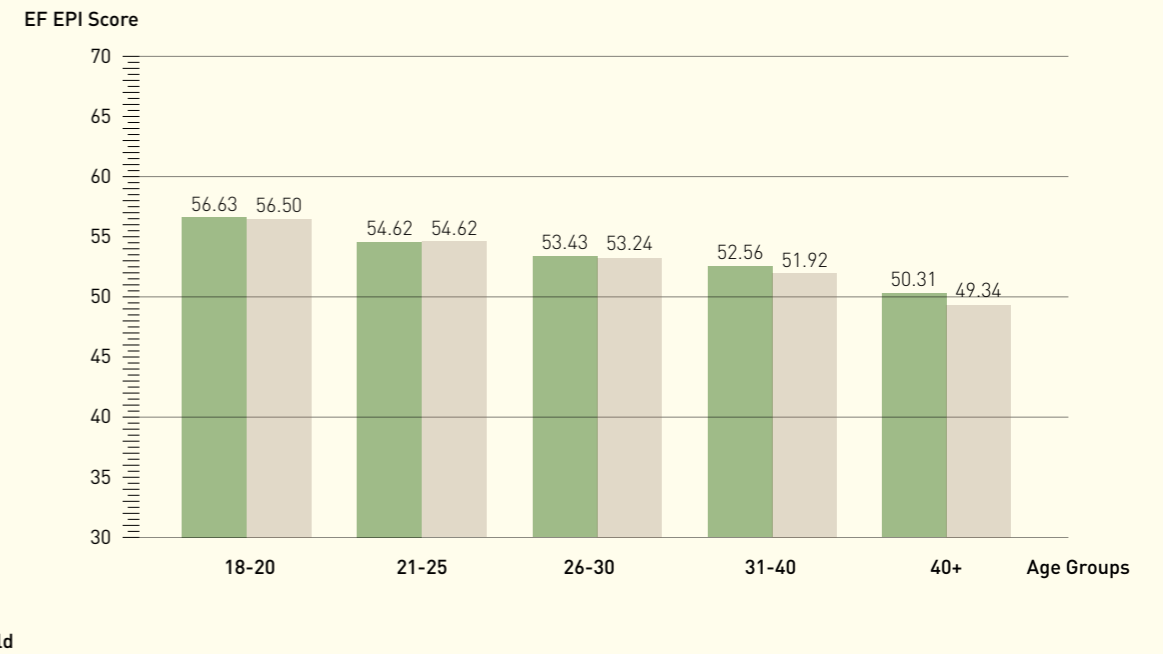
## GENDER GAP

The average scores of Asian women and men are slightly above global averages, with Asian women outscoring Asian men by nearly two points.



## GENERATION GAP

Scores for all age groups in Asia align closely with global averages. The youngest cohort has the best English proficiency in Asia, and skill levels decline with each older age group. This trend, in line with global results, suggests that instructional methods are improving, and we can expect to see better adult English proficiency in the years to come.



# LATIN AMERICA



**PROFICIENCY BANDS**

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

## LATIN AMERICA ACTS TO RAISE ENGLISH LEVELS

Adult English proficiency in Latin America is weak, and it has declined in many countries since last year. Of the 14 Latin American countries included in this year's index, all but two—Argentina and the Dominican Republic—fall in the lowest proficiency bands.

**SPANISH AS A REGIONAL LINGUA FRANCA**

Unlike in Europe and Asia, where English is the language of regional communication, Spanish unites Latin America. This shared regional language dampens incentives to master English and, alongside underperforming public education systems, is a key factor in the region's delayed progress towards higher English proficiency.

Although Spanish is the regional lingua franca, many Latin American countries recognize the value of an English-speaking workforce in a competitive global economy. These countries are investing in school reforms and teacher training programs aimed at raising English proficiency levels.

**ARGENTINA STAYS AHEAD**

Argentina is by far the strongest Latin American country in English proficiency. In general, English teachers in Argentina are highly qualified, as they must complete a five-year graduate program to teach in public schools. In its latest National Law of Education, passed in 2006, the Argentinian government made it mandatory for public schools to teach English as a foreign language to all students in grades four to twelve.

In recent years, economic stagnation among the members of the Mercosur bloc, a political and economic agreement of five South American countries, has prompted Argentina to look beyond its neighbors in search of a more diverse trading network. Daniel Scioli, former governor of Buenos Aires, supports English education as a means to strengthen Argentina's position in international trade.

**BRAZIL AND MEXICO FOCUS ON STUDENT MOBILITY**

Latin America's two most populous countries, Brazil and Mexico, have focused on sending hundreds of thousands of students to English-speaking countries for short-term and degree programs.

In an attempt to leverage its proximity and ties to the United States, the Mexican government launched Project 100,000 last year. By 2018, the program plans to have sent 100,000 Mexican students to the U.S. for short-term, intensive English language courses. In return, the U.S. has promised to send 50,000 students to study in Mexico by 2018. These bilateral initiatives aim to strengthen linguistic competency on both sides of the border.

In 2013, Brazil's Ministry of Education created English Without Borders to prepare university students for graduate studies in English-speaking countries. Since its launch, English Without Borders has tested and trained hundreds of thousands of students at hundreds of schools and universities across all Brazilian states.

Additionally, Brazil used the preparation for the Rio 2016 Olympics to build enthusiasm for English learning. The Ministries of Education and Tourism launched multiple English and Spanish training programs for different sectors of the population.

**COUNTRIES LEVERAGE TEACHER TRAINING**

Most English education reform initiatives in the region include training programs for local English teachers. Governments believe that investing in professional development for teachers will improve the English proficiency of generations of students. Our research supports this belief, consistently showing that investment in teacher training is one of the most effective means of improving English proficiency in the long term.

Ecuador's Go Teacher scholarship program and the Panama Bilingual Program send hundreds of local teachers to universities in English-speaking countries for language and methodology training every year. The Panama Bilingual Program also funds local training for English teachers, as well as additional English lessons for primary and secondary students.

In Colombia, President Juan Manuel Santos announced in July 2014 that his government will invest 690 million USD over the next 10 years to increase the number of university graduates with an upper-intermediate level of English. A portion of this budget will provide training for 12,000 local English language teachers.

**URUGUAY BEAMS IN TEACHERS FROM ABROAD**

In 2009, Uruguay became the first country in the world to give every student and teacher a laptop through Plan Ceibal, delivering more than 400,000 devices in less than two years. Plan Ceibal also connected nearly all schools to the Internet, allowing teachers to leverage the advantages of digital learning products.

In order to connect Uruguayan primary students to foreign English teachers, the Uruguayan government has rolled out videoconferencing technology in schools across the country. The project, called Ceibal en Inglés, has remotely connected English teachers from other countries, mainly the Philippines, to more than 90% of primary schools in Uruguay. Students and teachers are also provided with access to an online self-study English learning product.

**CONCLUSION**

Overall, English proficiency in Latin America is low, and there is substantial room for improvement. Nearly every country in the region has launched ambitious programs to augment or overhaul English language education. It remains to be seen which strategies and approaches will be most effective, but it is notable that these countries have recognized the need to improve English proficiency. A large cohort of well-trained English speakers in the workforce is key to Latin America's continued integration into the global market.



# LATIN AMERICA

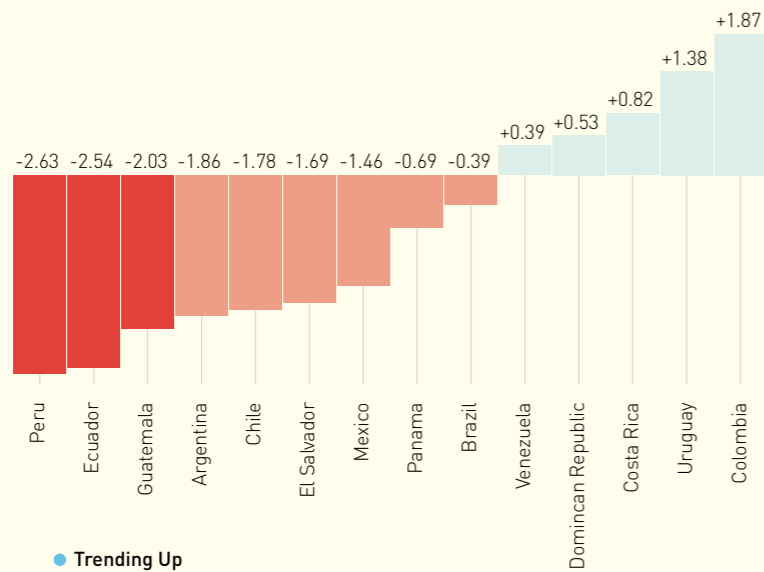
19 Argentina	58.40	45 Peru	49.83
23 Dominican Republic	57.24	47 Ecuador	49.13
36 Uruguay	51.63	49 Colombia	48.41
38 Costa Rica	51.35	50 Panama	48.08
40 Brazil	50.66	53 Guatemala	47.64
42 Chile	50.10	60 Venezuela	46.53
43 Mexico	49.88	63 El Salvador	43.83

● Very High   
 ● High   
 ● Moderate   
 ● Low   
 ● Very Low

## EF EPI TRENDS

Though the decline is slight, Latin America is the only region in the world with a lower average score than the previous year. Ecuador, Guatemala, and Peru declined the most, while Colombia and Uruguay made some progress.

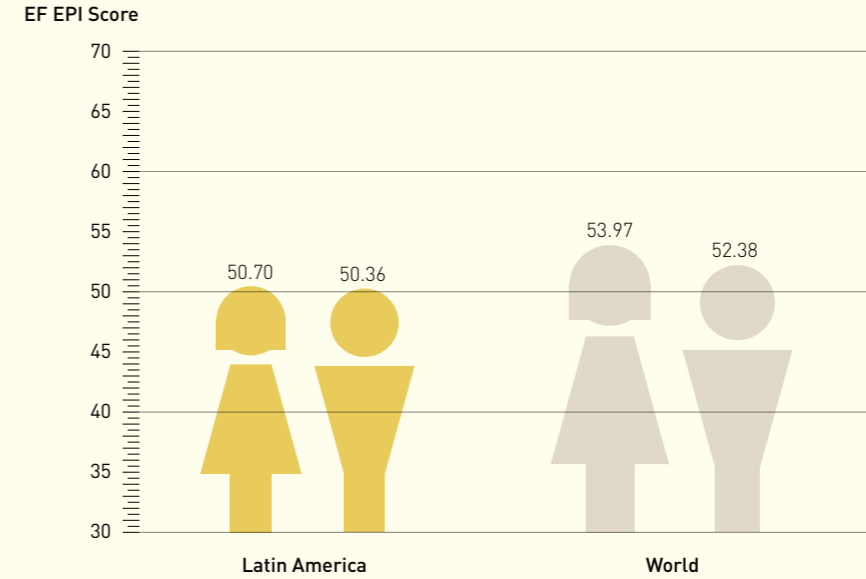
### EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



● Trending Down   
 ● Trending Up  
● Slight Decrease   
 ● Slight Increase

## GENDER GAP

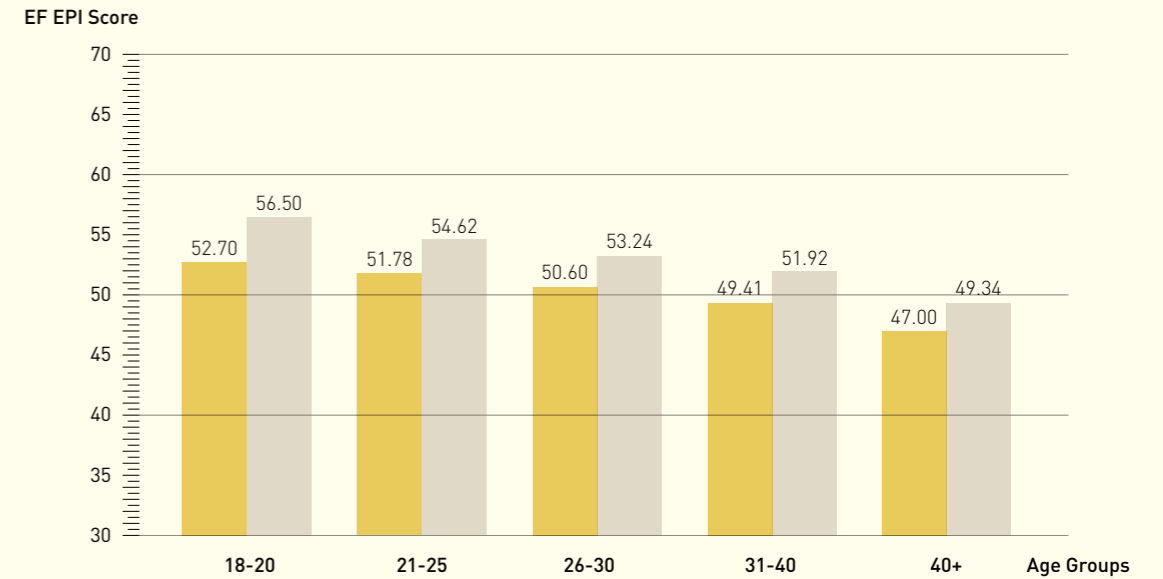
Average scores for both Latin American men and women are below global averages. Women still outpace men, but the gender difference is the smallest of any region.



● Latin America  
● World

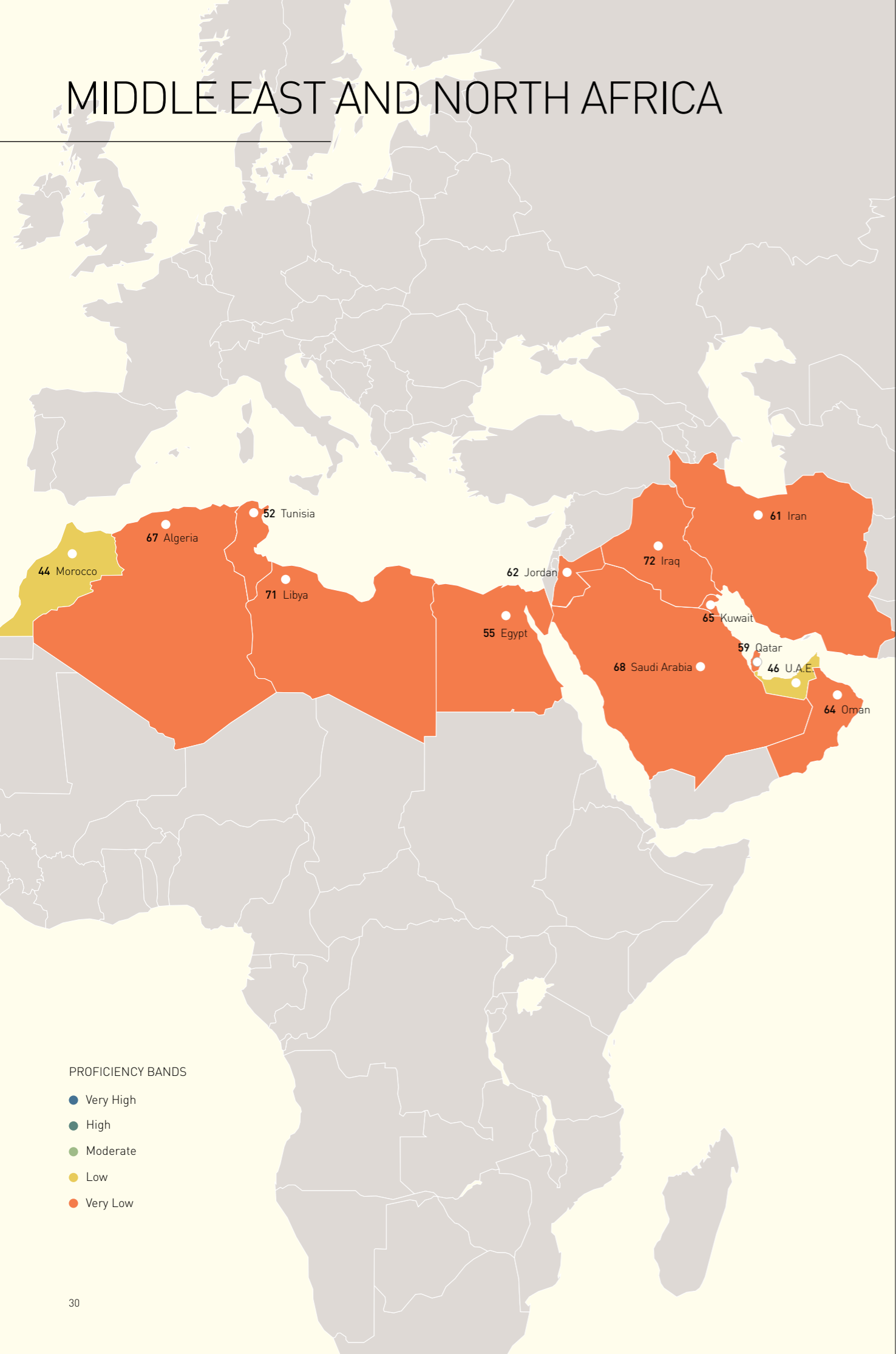
## GENERATION GAP

Scores for all age cohorts in Latin America are below global averages. In Latin America, young adults are further below their cohort's global average than are mid-career professionals, indicating that schools in the region are underperforming in English education. The region's language education initiatives need to help these young adults catch up.



● Latin America  
● World

# MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



## PROFICIENCY BANDS

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

## MENA STRUGGLES TO CATCH UP IN ENGLISH

The Middle East and North Africa has the lowest level of English proficiency in the world, and the overall level of proficiency is improving in only a few countries. All of the countries in the region are in the lowest proficiency band except for Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

### ENGLISH AS A BRIDGE

Since colonial times, English has served an important function in international trade and foreign aid in this region, which lies at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. In the MENA region, English is currently the primary language used for trade and diplomacy, military cooperation with foreign powers, and the exchange of technology and expertise across borders. English also facilitates a growing dialogue in the region among groups separated by linguistic and cultural barriers.

In the past generation, the role of English has changed dramatically for wealthy Arab individuals in particular. In the Gulf, where members of the upper class attend English-language schools in their own countries or abroad, English has changed from a privileged second language into a first language, sometimes at the expense of students' Arabic literacy. So although many English-language university programs in Gulf countries include students from the area, instructors find that these local students' written and professional Arabic skills need as much development as their English.

### DISTINGUISHING ENGLISH FROM WESTERN CULTURE

In socially conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen, one might assume that many locals would reject English due to its cultural associations with the West. Instead, public opinion surveys consistently find that English is widely accepted as necessary for international communication. This instrumental view of English has allowed for its wholehearted adoption.

In Saudi Arabia, English is the only foreign language taught in schools and the primary language of instruction in many university-level courses. There is a high demand in the Kingdom, however, for more culturally relevant teaching materials in English. Standard British or American textbooks are often seen as inappropriate.

Saudi Arabia's education system, like many in the Middle East, relies heavily on rote learning to prepare students for state exams. Although English is introduced early, these teaching methods mean that most students entering university in Saudi Arabia need remedial English courses before they can begin their courses of study. Many Saudi students who can afford the expense go abroad to improve their English.

### MAGHREB EMBRACES ENGLISH

Although historically tied by both trade and emigration to France, countries in the Maghreb increasingly see English as a way to modernize their workforce and gain access to the rest of the world. English proficiency is still low, but enthusiasm for English is growing.

Morocco is typical of this trend, with more English schools opening each year and plans to switch the language of the higher education system from French to English. French has negative connotations for many in Morocco because it was the language of the elite during the colonial period. English, on the other hand, has no historical baggage in Morocco. It is seen as an equal-opportunity language open to all social classes.

The arrival of Daewoo and other Asian manufacturers in the country has further underscored the economic value of mastering English. Morocco has moved out of the Very Low Proficiency band in this year's index and, if enthusiasm for English is anything to go by, should continue to make progress over the coming years.

### STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

One of the major difficulties for effective education reform in MENA is the structure of the labor market, which in many countries includes a public sector that employs as much as half of the formally employed workforce, a far higher percentage than most economies outside the region. A large public sector with guaranteed lifetime employment and

higher wages than the private sector distorts incentives by making public sector jobs more appealing than any others.

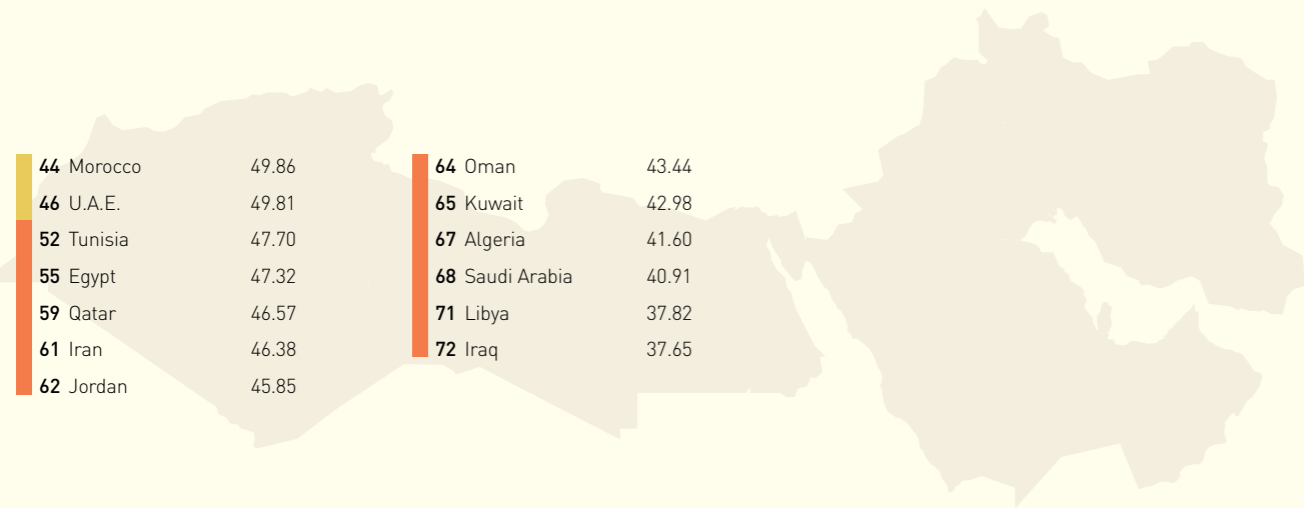
Despite its size, the public sector in the MENA region is poorly structured to absorb all the qualified graduates the university systems produce, resulting in unusually high unemployment rates among qualified young people and significant migration away from the region. These inefficiencies in the labor market disincentivize young people from achieving academically.

These economic challenges are compounded by the relative youth of the MENA region's population. About 20% of the MENA population is aged 15-25, and another 45% is younger than 15. Although birth rates have declined in the past few years, this large cohort of young people moving through schools has stressed education systems in the region. The large number of young people also presents an opportunity: if schools could teach English effectively to such a large number of students, the region's average adult proficiency levels would rise quickly as the cohort advances into adulthood. However, little evidence suggests that this is occurring.

### CONCLUSION

While reforming the education systems in the MENA region as a whole is essential, such reform will not be sufficient to align economic incentives with educational objectives, whether in English or in other fields. Until a restructured economy encourages private enterprise, there will be fewer incentives to learn English than there are elsewhere in the world.

# MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

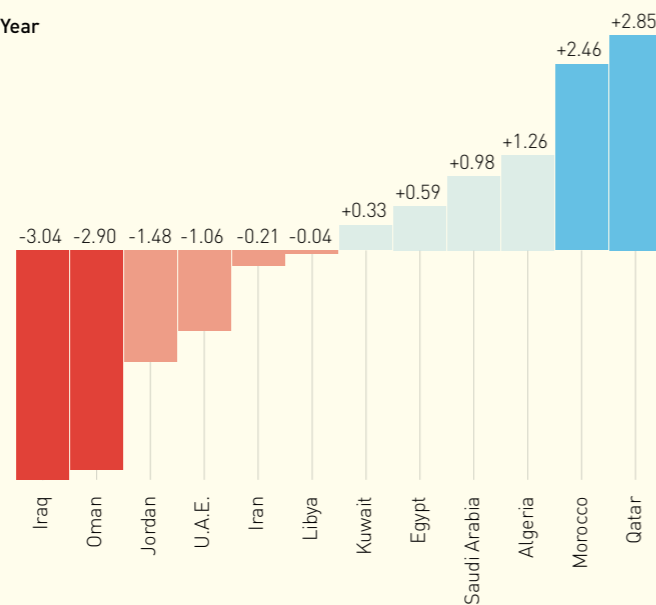


● Very High ● High ● Moderate ● Low ● Very Low

## EF EPI TRENDS

MENA shows the greatest score fluctuations from last year. Despite Morocco and Qatar making notable improvements, all but two of the MENA countries remain in the lowest proficiency band. Iraq's and Oman's scores have dropped the most in MENA.

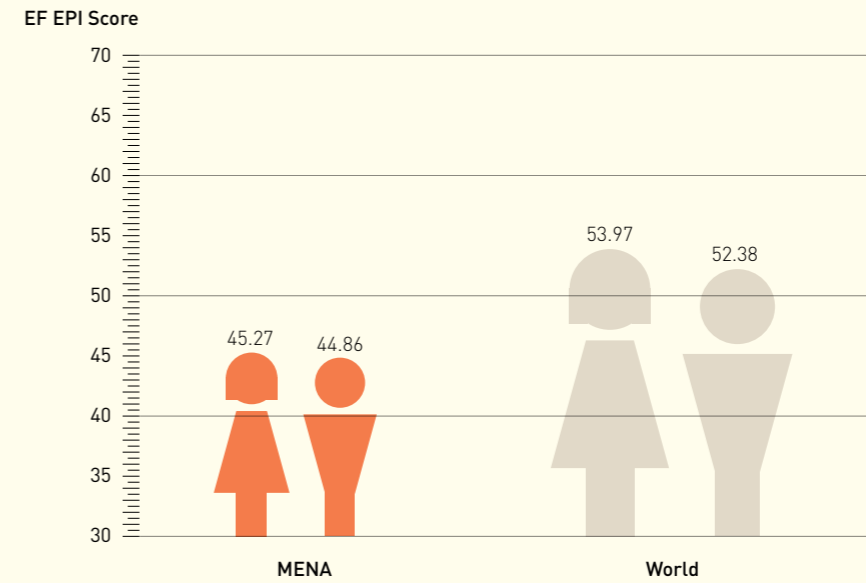
EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



● Trending Down ● Trending Up  
● Slight Decrease ● Slight Increase

## GENDER GAP

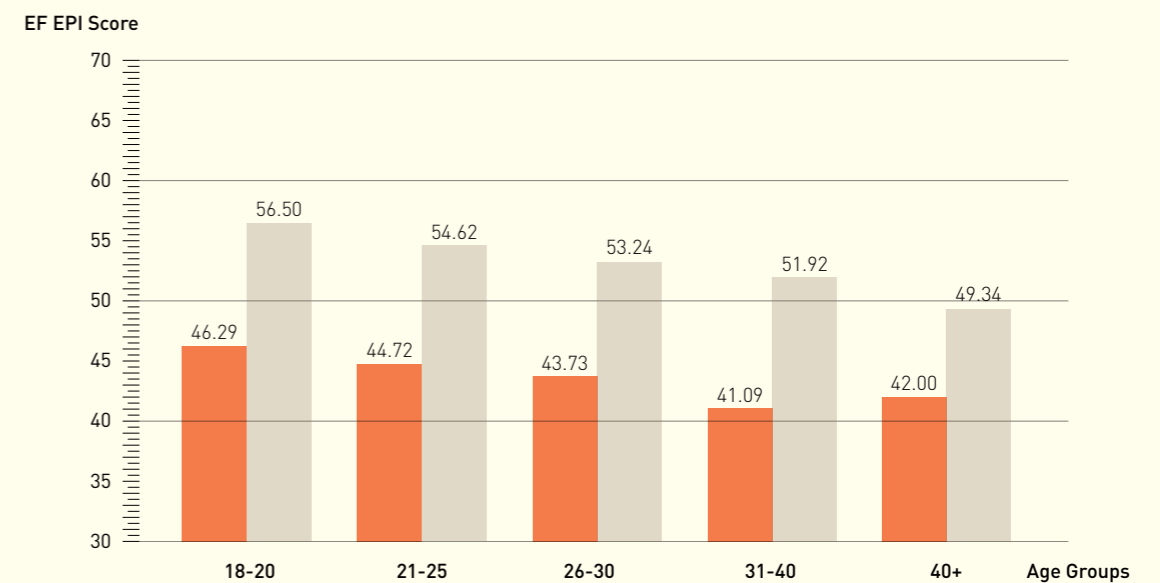
Average scores for both women and men in the MENA region are significantly lower than global averages, with women slightly outperforming men, as is the case in the other three regions.



● MENA ● World

## GENERATION GAP

Average scores across all age groups in the MENA region fall significantly below global averages. The 31-40 year-old age group has the weakest English, which differs from the global trend. This difference is remarkable because adults over 40 most likely picked up their English skills outside of school, either from individual study initiatives or in the workplace.



● MENA ● World



## CONCLUSIONS

English skills are a basic requirement in today's global economy. Mastery of a language is difficult and expensive, but parents and professionals understand the value of investing in English training, and companies and governments recognize the link between workforce English and long-term competitiveness in the 21st century.

In this sixth edition of the EF EPI, we have reviewed the challenges countries face in providing quality English education to large populations of students, and the diverse approaches and strategies they employ. We discussed the role English plays in driving innovation, and the opportunities that exist for leveraging technology for more efficient and personalized learning.

Our research leads us to identify the following best practices in effective English education:

- **Consider English within the framework of broader reforms.** In countries with low educational attainment and high inequality, giving all students access to at least a decade of quality public education, including instruction in English, inevitably leads to better English proficiency among adults.

- **Cultivate a culture of multilingualism.** The more families, schools, and governments do to foster the expectation that everyone will speak more than one language, the more children will expect it of themselves. This culture of multilingualism is difficult to define but easy to recognize. Visitors notice it immediately in Scandinavia and other high proficiency places.

- **Focus on practical communication skills from day one.** The ultimate objective of language education is the ability to communicate with others in the language. Therefore, effective English instruction prioritizes communication over grammatical correctness or the reproduction of native-speaker accents. Many adults, having studied in more traditional settings that emphasized grammar over fluency, need extra practice with listening and speaking.

- **Develop effective English assessments.** Different situations, needs, and learner objectives require different evaluations. It is particularly important to reform high-stakes exams because of the way they influence pedagogy across the board. Making high-quality standardized tests free and accessible to adult learners is in line with other open-access trends in continuing education.

- **Invest in teacher training.** If well-designed and executed, training programs for aspiring teachers and professional development for established teachers are smart investments. More skilled teachers can impact several generations of students.

- **Support workplace and private sector training for adults.** In many cases, adult learners have frequent opportunities to interact with native English speakers at work, strong motivation to improve, and money to invest in upgrading their skill set. Adult English training must be included in broader discussions about English education.

- **Leverage technology and online learning tools.** For adult English learners, alternative classroom formats are especially beneficial. MOOCs, video call tutoring, and online conversation classes all offer working adults more flexible learning opportunities. Self-study apps and other mobile products also allow anyone to learn basic grammar, vocabulary, and listening on the go.

It takes a great deal of effort and investment to steer a country or company towards a future with an English-speaking workforce. We hope that by sharing our data and analyses of adult English proficiency trends, we have contributed to global discussions about English language education.



A look at changes in English skills over the past year:

The EF EPI score change is the difference between a country's EF EPI fifth edition and sixth edition scores. Any change greater than two points—positive or negative—indicates a significant shift in English ability. The EF EPI fifth edition used test data from 2014, and the sixth from 2015.

COUNTRY	EF EPI FIFTH EDITION	EF EPI SIXTH EDITION	SCORE CHANGE
ALGERIA	40.34	41.60	+1.26
ARGENTINA	60.26	58.40	-1.86
AUSTRIA	61.97	62.13	+0.16
AZERBAIJAN	46.12	46.90	+0.78
BELGIUM	59.13	60.90	+1.77
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	—	56.17	new
BRAZIL	51.05	50.66	-0.39
BULGARIA	—	56.79	new
CAMBODIA	39.15	39.48	+0.33
CHILE	51.88	50.10	-1.78
CHINA	49.41	50.94	+1.53
COLOMBIA	46.54	48.41	+1.87
COSTA RICA	50.53	51.35	+0.82
CZECH REPUBLIC	59.01	59.09	+0.08
DENMARK	70.05	71.15	+1.10
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	56.71	57.24	+0.53
ECUADOR	51.67	49.13	-2.54
EGYPT	46.73	47.32	+0.59
EL SALVADOR	45.52	43.83	-1.69
FINLAND	65.32	66.61	+1.29
FRANCE	51.84	54.33	+2.49
GERMANY	61.83	61.58	-0.25
GUATEMALA	49.67	47.64	-2.03
HONG KONG	52.70	54.29	+1.59
HUNGARY	57.90	58.72	+0.82
INDIA	58.21	57.30	-0.91
INDONESIA	52.91	52.94	+0.03
IRAN	46.59	46.38	-0.21
IRAQ	40.69	37.65	-3.04
ITALY	54.02	54.63	+0.61
JAPAN	53.57	51.69	-1.88
JORDAN	47.33	45.85	-1.48
KAZAKHSTAN	47.04	47.42	+0.38
KUWAIT	42.65	42.98	+0.33
LAOS	—	38.45	new
LIBYA	37.86	37.82	-0.04

COUNTRY	EF EPI FIFTH EDITION	EF EPI SIXTH EDITION	SCORE CHANGE
LUXEMBOURG	63.45	63.20	-0.25
MACAU	—	51.36	new
MALAYSIA	60.30	60.70	+0.40
MEXICO	51.34	49.88	-1.46
MONGOLIA	43.64	42.77	-0.87
MOROCCO	47.40	49.86	+2.46
NETHERLANDS	70.58	72.16	+1.58
NORWAY	67.83	68.54	+0.71
OMAN	46.34	43.44	-2.90
PAKISTAN	49.96	48.78	-1.18
PANAMA	48.77	48.08	-0.69
PERU	52.46	49.83	-2.63
PHILIPPINES	—	60.33	new
POLAND	62.95	61.49	-1.46
PORTUGAL	60.61	59.68	-0.93
QATAR	43.72	46.57	+2.85
ROMANIA	59.69	58.14	-1.55
RUSSIA	51.59	52.32	+0.73
SAUDI ARABIA	39.93	40.91	+0.98
SERBIA	—	59.07	new
SINGAPORE	61.08	63.52	+2.44
SLOVAKIA	56.34	57.34	+1.00
SOUTH KOREA	54.52	54.87	+0.35
SPAIN	56.80	56.66	-0.14
SRI LANKA	47.89	46.58	-1.31
SWEDEN	70.94	70.81	-0.13
SWITZERLAND	58.43	60.17	+1.74
TAIWAN	53.18	52.82	-0.36
THAILAND	45.35	47.21	+1.86
TUNISIA	—	47.70	new
TURKEY	47.62	47.89	+0.27
UKRAINE	52.61	50.62	-1.99
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	50.87	49.81	-1.06
URUGUAY	50.25	51.63	+1.38
VENEZUELA	46.14	46.53	+0.39
VIETNAM	53.81	54.06	+0.25



<b>PROFICIENT USER</b>	<b>C2</b>	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently, and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	<b>C1</b>	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.
<b>INDEPENDENT USER</b>	<b>B2</b>	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	<b>B1</b>	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
<b>BASIC USER</b>	<b>A2</b>	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to most relevant areas (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate during routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need.
	<b>A1</b>	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows, and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

QUOTED FROM THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

All countries in the EF EPI fall into bands corresponding to levels A2-B2.

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# EFSET: INNOVATION IN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

In order to make English language testing accessible to more of the world's two billion English language learners, the EF Standard English Test (EFSET) was launched two years ago as the world's first completely free standardized English test. The EFSET challenges the long-held assumption that English certification tests must be expensive and inconvenient.

The demand for reliable, scalable, and flexible English testing has prompted individuals and institutions to adopt the EFSET as an international standardized test. The EFSET has become especially valuable to schools, companies, and governments, where large-scale testing was previously cost prohibitive.

The EFSET is an adaptive test that has been developed on a foundation of evidence-based research and ongoing psychometric analysis of test data. EF developed the EFSET in partnership with the world's top experts in language assessment, large-scale testing, and psychometrics. Two correlation studies confirm that EFSET scores are as reliable as traditional tests such as TOEFL and IELTS.

The EFSET is available online for free ([www.efset.org](http://www.efset.org)) for learners of all levels. Anonymized EFSET results are used with test takers' permission to compile the EF EPI.



EF STANDARD ENGLISH TEST

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